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*Butter late than
never
Town & Davids
Laugharne*

ROCHE CASTLE, LAUGHARNE

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ROCHE CASTLE is a small manor house on the outskirts of Laugharne. In the past two years (1959-1961) the site has been considerably altered by housing development and the slight remains will become increasingly difficult to appreciate. This account records the ruins before building started. The castle had not been scheduled as an "Ancient Monument," but the survey was undertaken by the writer at the instigation of the Ministry of Works.

History

Little is known of the history of the site but throughout the medieval period it seems to have been part of the manor of Eglwys Cymyn, a settlement 4 miles west of Roche. In about 1248 this manor within the Lordship of Tallacharn (Laugharne) was granted by Thomas Wallensis (Bishop of St. Davids 1247-1255) to his niece Matilda on her marriage to John de Rupe or de la Roche. John was a member of the Pembrokeshire family who took their name from the rock on which was set Roche Castle, a prominent landmark between Haverfordwest and St. Davids. It is difficult to identify the branch which held Eglwys Cymyn since the Roche family owned land throughout south Pembrokeshire and west Carmarthenshire. Yet it must have been this family which gave their name to the house near Laugharne since there is no local feature to account for this place-name. In 1575 Sir John Perrot of Haroldston held this manor (Eglwys Cymyn and The Roches) as well as the main manor or Barony of Tallacharn (Laugharne). He did not inherit all the manors which he possessed in Pembrokeshire and west Carmarthenshire, and Roche may have been among his purchases. After Sir John's attainder in 1592 his estates were divided; since that date the site has passed through many owners, none of them resident in the castle.

Early in the 17th century the castle was robbed for building material to erect the mansion at Broadway nearby; the clay needed for the casting of Laugharne church bells in 1718-20 was dug from the Roaches. The earliest description of the site as a 'castle' seems to be on Thomas Kitchin's Map of Carmarthenshire (1754); the name is repeated on Emmanuel Bowen's Map of South Wales (c. 1760). This suggests a piece of mid-eighteenth century romanticism. The first published Ordnance Survey map (1831) shows two towers linked by a wall on the south-western side of the house platform; an inhabited cottage adjoins the southern tower on the east. A similar state of affairs is

recorded on the Tithe Apportionment map in 1842.⁸ Shortly after this the cottages beside the Pendine road were built, and the southern tower and part of the undercroft vault were pulled down. During the 19th century the Castle is briefly noted in directories,⁹ but the fullest account is that given by Miss Mary Curtis in 1871.¹⁰ Since she provides the best record of the site, her description will be considered in the architectural section below. Between 1880 and 1912 a dovecote was removed. In 1959 the derelict cottage, itself built from and upon the ruins, was demolished and in 1960 part of the vault north-east of the remaining tower was pulled down. At the time of writing only a single tower stands with a short stretch of wall adjacent.

Description (Figure 3)

The Castle is a manor house and not a stronghold chosen for its defensive potentialities. It stands half a mile south-west of Laugharne in a gently sloping valley drained by the stream called Mackerel Lake; it is sheltered on the seaward side by Sir John's Hill and lies at the foot of Hugden. Both these flanking hills rise over 250 feet above sea level, while the house platform of Roche is placed on the valley floor at exactly 100 feet above Ordnance Datum level. The road between Laugharne and Pendine passes through the valley south of the castle; the area is known as Broadway from the 17th-century mansion of the Powell family. The underlying rock is Old Red Sandstone producing a heavy clay soil. This sandstone gives a poor quality building stone which has been augmented at Roche and Laugharne castles by a Carboniferous Limestone for which a most likely source was the outcrop at Coygan nearby. Similar use of limestone for quoins and architectural details may be seen at Llanstephan Castle.

The ground on which the castle stands slopes slightly from south-west to north-east, but an artificial platform has been made creating a roughly square area 240 feet north-south by 220 feet. The soil to build this platform was taken partly from the ditches to the east and west but largely from what is now rough pasture to the north. A section cut beside the west ditch showed a build-up of 2½ feet upon the original ground level. The ditch is most prominent on the north-west, 35 feet wide and 10 feet from bank crest to ditch bottom. On the west and north the ground still remains damp while on the east the outlines of the ditch merge with the stream's banks. There is no evidence of a ditch on the south-west side where the slopes of Hugden command the approach. A slight bank, running from north-west to south-east, divides the platform into an upper and a lower area.

The upper area is approximately 160 feet square and it is here that the remaining buildings stand: the tower and adjacent wall are now both heavily covered with ivy. The tower is semi-circular, standing to a height of 14 feet; its windowless ground floor is 39 inches in internal radius and has a plain vaulted roof; the walls of the upper storey are roughly plastered, containing on the south side a slit window with an internal splay. The wall adjoining the tower on the south-east consists of a length of poorly-built rubble wall, 12 feet high, 17 feet long externally and 4 feet thick. On the inner (north-east) side of this wall is the springing of a vault for an upper floor, 15 feet wide; the wall is pierced by a deeply splayed slit window at ground floor level. A window opening of the upper storey is indicated by the uneven height of the wall top. The vaulted undercroft had an open arch to the north-west; the possibility that this arch was the original entrance to this building is considered later. During the course of building operations other wall foundations were observed and their position is marked on the plan (Figure 3). From the information these foundations provided it was not possible to determine the purpose of the other buildings within the upper area. The bell described in a later section (p. 12) was found with 14th century pottery at the southern edge of the excavation for the west bungalow.

The lower area is cut by a drainage gully and two low mounds of loose stone rubble stand on the north-eastern side. The larger eastern one was traversed by a drainage trench and revealed a small building, 8 feet square, with thin walls set on poor foundations but surrounded by a scatter of late medieval pottery.

Architectural Discussion

The fragmentary ruins are now so devoid of architectural details and so thickly shrouded in ivy that it is impossible to date the building more closely than to the late 13th or early 14th century. A parallel may be seen in the early 14th century gatehouse at Llanstephan Castle with shallow staircase towers on its inner face."

From the evidence of the earliest Ordnance Survey map and from Miss Curtis' account the length of wall now remaining stood between two towers, and the ungroined vaulted undercroft was so divided that it gave the appearance of cells, "several round rooms without windows and close together." On the upper floor "a large round room was preserved with windows like the castle windows, small bay ones" possibly improvements by Sir John Perrot made at the same time as his work on Laugharne Castle. Miss Curtis

also mentions a spiral staircase and this probably occupied one of the towers.

To the south-east of this ruined wall stood a cottage (demolished in 1959); the ground floor incorporated parts of the medieval house." It seems likely that the north-east side of the courtyard or upper area was closed by a wall: "the wall, at the side of the house just opposite its ruins, looks so ancient that it was no doubt part of the castle." This describes the south-west wall of the cottage and was altered in Miss Curtis' later edition to read "the wall enclosing the castle was in existence thirty or forty years ago."

The tower and wall still remaining may best be interpreted as part of a 'hall-house' with a first-floor hall and an undercroft below; other domestic buildings flanked this main block within the upper court, and these are indicated by the foundations observed during 1960. Less important buildings of a slighter nature would occupy the lower area. Among the domestic buildings in the upper court was a dovecote, which had been the subject of an agreement between Sir John Perrot and Laugharne Corporation." This dovecote "was at the side of that house just before (you reach) the ruins of the castle, and the holes of the dovecote are at the gable-end side of the house towards Pendine way." At Oxwich Castle in Gower the circular dovecote is similarly situated at an angle between two ranges.

Although the castle is now usually approached from the east, the entrance to the upper platform must formerly have been from the south-west beside the remaining tower. No trace of such a gateway now remains, but the ruined open north-western end of the undercroft conveyed to Miss Curtis the impression of a "large arched entrance such as you would imagine would lead into a courtyard." This is certainly the point at which an entry could most easily be made to the platform, while the approach from all other directions could be prevented by damming the Mackerel Lake north of the castle before the brook's steep descent down Skerry Hill. The area such a water defence would cover is called 'Moor' in the Tithe Apportionment map of 1842." However such a water defence seems unlikely when the site could easily be commanded from the high ground of Hugden.

The Finds

Sacring Bell (Figure 4). This small bronze bell was found at the southern end of the western bungalow excavation. The clapper is lost, but there has been considerable use judging by the wear inside the lip. There is a moulding wire above the soundbow and two faint incised lines below the shoulder. The attachment probably held a ring handle. Late medieval in date.

For a similar bell from The Abbey, Caerns. see *R.C.A.M., Caerns. Inventory*, Vol. I, Plate 22. Sacring bells of similar size from Renfrew and Paisley, *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, 1947-8, p. 172-3. For the purpose of these bells see *Arch. Camb.*, 1894, p. 186 and Fenton, *Tours in Wales*, (*Arch. Camb.* supplement) Introduction, pp. xii-xv.

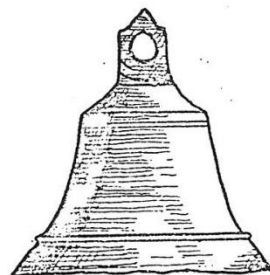
Pottery (Figure 5). The pottery was not found in archaeologically sealed layers but recovered during trenching for the bungalows and their drains. The fragments illustrated are of interest since they support the dating given to the castle on architectural grounds and from documentary evidence. The sherds not illustrated are either of coarse gritty fabrics with traces of green glaze for which a 14th century date is probable or else of finer sandy pastes producing unglazed red wares for which a late medieval date is likely.

(The description of no. 1 is based on the comments of G. C. Dunning and of no. 5 on those of L. Alcock.)

1. Base of jug: off-white ware, pale green glaze outside. An import from Western France in the late 13th or early 14th century. For the type of jug from Kidwelly see *Archaeologia*, Vol. 83, p. 133, fig. 14 *d* and *e*. Also found in North Wales: Cricieth (*Arch. Camb.*, 1944, p. 45, fig. 8), Gogarth (*Caerns. Hist. Soc. Trans.*, 1956, Appendix iii) and Conway (not yet published).
2. Fragment of jug body; fine grey fabric, light red inner surface, lightly glazed yellow-green on outer surface. Decoration of applied pellets between horizontal grooves. Probably 14th century.
3. Small sherd with thick dark green glaze outside and thick yellow glaze inside. Decorated on outer surface with closely-set impressions of a rosette stamp. The glazes suggest a late medieval date or even Tudor period.
4. Rim sherd of cooking pot; coarse gritty light red ware. The rim slopes markedly outward and the edge also has an outer slope. Probably 13th century.
5. Rim of bowl; coarse pink fabric with large grits, poorly fired. Olive-green glaze on inner surface below rim. Probably 14th century. The sherd illustrated is from Dinas Powis, Glam., but the form and fabric are sufficiently similar to more fragmentary pieces from Roche to make the parallel appropriate.

Conclusion

This small fortified manor house is similar to many 'castles' which were erected along the coastal plain of South and West Wales during the thirteenth century." A few have been continuously inhabited and so preserved their fabric, often much altered. The majority of them are, however, little more than field names and Roche will soon be one of their number. It is important, therefore, to have a record of this site before all trace of masonry has disappeared.



Roche: Sacring Bell

actual size

Figure 4

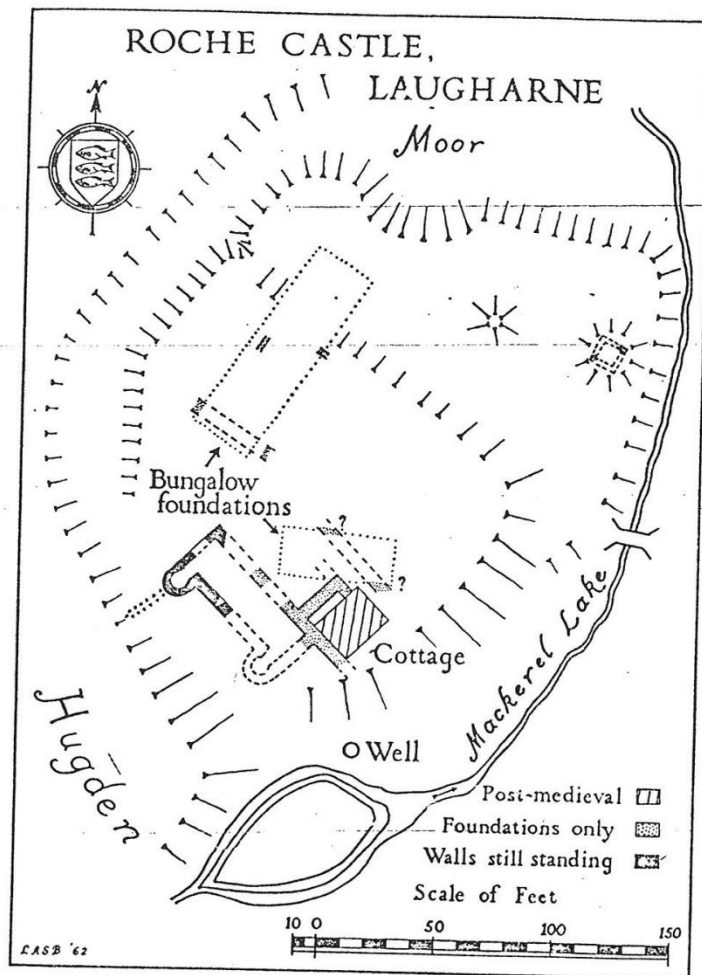


Figure 3

NOTES

1. National Grid Reference: SN 294 103.
Carmarthenshire 6 inch O.S. Sheet XLV S.W.
2. Although the writer is a member of the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire, the views expressed in this article are entirely his own. I should like to thank Messrs. D. H. Rees and H. V. Cameron, the owners of the site for their co-operation and their kindness in giving the finds to Carmarthen Museum; my colleague, C. H. Houlder, Esq., M.A., F.S.A., for his assistance in the survey; G. C. Dunning, Esq., B. Sc., F.S.A., for his comments on the pottery and L. Alcock, Esq., M.A., F.S.A., for his assistance in finding comparable medieval pottery from South Wales. The sacring bell was cleaned by the National Museum of Wales and the finds are in Carmarthen Museum.
3. The charter is printed in full in *Arch. Camb.*, 1852, p. 259. It is possible that the origin of this manor house lies in a member of the Roche family consolidating a burgess holding in the open fields; such a position for a house would give a minor stake in the maritime trade of the Tâf estuary. For the importance of the estuary and its fishing and trade in giving diversity to the economy of Laugharne, see Dr. Margaret Davies, 'The Open Fields of Laugharne'; *Geography*, XL (1955), pp. 169-77.
4. Henry Owen considered John de la Roche was of the main line (*Arch. Camb.*, 1914, pp. 441-6); the family died out in the main line late in the 14th century. For the Roche family also see *Arch. Camb.*, 1852, pp. 135-6, 258-71. For their connection with the Perrots of Scotsborough, *Arch. Camb.*, 1865, pp. 233-5; the Perrots of Scotsborough and those of Haroldston were inter-related.
5. A Deed of Settlement listing Sir John Perrot's entire estate in 1575 is in *Arch. Camb.*, 1866, pp. 478-81. Sir John was indirectly related both to the Roche family and to the de Brian family, former holders of the Barony of Tallacharn.
6. *Carmis. Ant. Soc. Trans.*, XVIII (1925), p. 78.
7. The MS drawings on which the map was based show the area of the castle (unnamed) as if it were isolated by a ditch, but this may be to distinguish the private property of the castle from the town's open fields surrounding it.
8. In National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.
9. e.g. Gorton and Wright, *Topographical Dictionary* (1833), quoted in *Carmis. Ant. Soc. Trans.*, XIV (1920-21), p. 23.
10. 'The History and Antiquities of Laugharne'. The quotations given in the present article are taken from the 1871 edition (p. 40); the 1880 edition with the same title gives a slightly different account of the castle and includes a poor sketch. The 1880 edition was used by the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments for their *Carmarthenshire Inventory* (1917), p. 63.
11. R.C.A.M., *Carmis. Inventory*, Figure 156.
12. These "cells" suggested "the vestiges of an ancient monastery" to Samuel Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* (1833).
13. The Ancient Monuments Inspectorate of the Ministry of Works kindly made available the illustrated report on the site, which was visited in March 1931 and August 1933.
14. Miss Curtis, *op. cit.* (1871 edition), p. 114; also noted by R.C.A.M., *Carmis. Inventory*, p. 63 and *Carmarthen County History*, Vol. I, p. 287.
15. Some of the irregularities in this field are due to an 18th century cockpit (Curtis, *op. cit.* (1880 edition) p. 205); the construction of the pond south of the castle may be connected with a grist mill of similar date.

16. Although it is possible to identify the remains at Roche as a first-floor hall, this hall does not seem to be part of a free-standing 'tower-house' of the type best represented in this region by Eastington and 'The Old Rectory,' Angle, Pembs. (*Arch. Camb.*, 1868, pp. 70-84).

ABBREVIATIONS:

<i>Arch. Camb.</i>	=	Archæologia Cambrensis
<i>Carm. Ant. Soc. Trans.</i>	=	Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society Transactions.
R.C.A.M.	=	Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire.